

## African Region

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### Introduction

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is a joint venture between the International Association for Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

The team that leads the Global Agenda for the African region is Antoinette Lombard (South Africa) and Janestic Twikirize (Uganda) for IASSW; Judith Kaulen (Zimbabwe) for ICSW and Charles Mbugua (Kenya) for IFSW. Abye Tasse (IASSW) and Charles Abbey (ICSW) provide the link between the Africa region and the Global Coordinating Group of the Global Agenda.

The Africa region is committed to the institutionalization of the African Observatory for the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. The process towards this end commenced with individual discussions and by preparing the data collection instruments. The Africa region used two international conferences as a platform to launch the Global Agenda Dialogue; to articulate mechanisms to solicit participation for collecting data on the theme, *Promoting social and economic equalities*; and to start coordinating the work in the region. The first was the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) conference in Uganda in July 2013. The IFSW African Regional Conference, hosted by the National Association for Social Work South Africa (NASW:SA) in September 2013, provided a further platform to discuss the Global Agenda, to plan and coordinate activities (in particular, to solicit and mobilize participation in the data gathering actions) and to agree recommendations to the United Nations and others.

Data on the first pillar of the Global Agenda, namely *Promoting social and economic equalities*, were obtained by means of case studies and an online survey. In both instances, a set of questions guided the data gathering processes. Colleagues could choose to respond to the survey or send in a case study or do both. The purpose of the data instruments was to gather data on activities/experiences/examples/case studies on how social work and development educators and practitioners promote social and economic equality. The data gathering instruments clearly stated that participation was voluntary; that all the data would be captured for the envisaged Africa Regional Observatory and would be a source of information for teaching, practice and research purposes, including research reports and professional and scientific publications.

The data gathering instruments were directed at social work and social development practitioners, academics and students. The call for participation was circulated amongst various academic and practitioner networks within the Africa region. Seven case studies were received, albeit in different formats; two from South Africa, four from Uganda and one from Kenya. A total of 188 responses were received for the online survey. In view of the limited scope of this observatory report, the discussion will only focus on an analysis of the case studies. The following section will present a preliminary view on how social workers and social development practitioners in the region see their role in promoting social and economic equalities; what activities they engage in and how they succeed in reducing social and economic inequalities. Seven case studies in three countries cannot claim to be the voice of Africa; however they offer, within the qualitative context of case studies and taken with other evidence, significant pointers to the current social and

economic equality activities among social workers and social development practitioners in the region. Analysis of the quantitative online survey will strengthen the research findings from the case studies, to be read alongside the outcomes from the conferences.

## **Promoting social and economic equality**

The themes for the respective case studies are as follows: 1) a day in the life of street children, a case study of a social worker making a difference in the lives of street children; 2) agri-business value chains and social enterprises for economic empowerment; 3) reflections on a national day labour study and a national street waste pickers' study; 4) IT&R&L&NG Women's Project on social services to families and sustainable livelihoods; 5) medical social worker in the Nyeri Provincial General Hospital; 6) promoting social and economic equalities in Rakai District, Uganda: Case study on Mannya Parish Kifamba Sub County; and 7) case study project summary: Sustainable Livelihoods for Women Ex-combatants (SLIWE). The discussion that follows is a consolidation of the answers to the respective questions that underpinned the case study data collection instrument.

## *Defining social and economic inequality*

The case studies reveal that social workers and social development practitioners engage in environments where people's living conditions are inadequate and depicting a wide gap between the rich and the poor. They define social and economic inequalities as disparities and unfairness in distribution of both economic and social resources which create a gap between the rich and the poor, influencing social service delivery and ultimately the well-being of people. Social and economic inequalities are evident in the case studies in relation to income (including wages and social transfers), social class, housing (shelter) and access to clean drinking water, health services, education and infrastructure like road and communication networks.

## *Theories and approaches*

Theoretical frameworks and approaches that social workers use in the studies to analyse the problems that social and economic inequalities present and to inform interventions, include theories on social learning; social enterprise; gender and social inclusion. Approaches include social development; empowerment; strengths-based perspective; human-rights; asset-based planning; Max Neef-Fundamental Human Needs; sustainable livelihoods; People Centred Development; psychosocial and client centred approaches.

## *Target populations and nature of activities*

Children, youth and women feature prominently in the activities of the case studies. Social and economic inequalities are addressed on both a structural and personal level which depicts an emphasis on micro- and macro-practice. Activities include, amongst others, establishment of social enterprises; business mentorship; youth cooperatives and youth focused financial services including access to finance; youth engagement in governance and leadership; sustainable livelihoods; child and youth policy development; peace building and reconciliation; establishing food gardens; forming of women's groups for income generating projects; early childhood development activities; training in various skills, including entrepreneurship and life skills and adult literacy; information campaigns and advocacy on human rights; assisting beneficiaries to obtain

documentation such as birth certificates to access social grants and the reintegration of vulnerable populations such as women ex-combatants and children living on the street back into society. Activities also include protective services targeting safety of children, including rehabilitation and protection of children living on the street and protecting them against drug abuse and being used to sell drugs and in particular, girls being gang raped; protection of women from sexual and labour exploitation and physical violence; advocacy and improved service delivery to former abductees, ex-child soldiers, international displaced persons and refugees, and advocating for good harvesting and planting methods, organic farming, green growth and environmental conservation in an endeavour to achieve sustainable agribusiness. From these activities, the wide spectrum of second-generation rights (Ife, 2012) is observed as well as the importance of social workers involvement in promoting social, economic and environment justice.

### *Role players involved*

It is evident from the case studies that a combined effort of various stakeholders is needed to promote social and economic equalities. Role players in the listed activities include civil organizations; religious leaders; local leaders; central government officials; school administrators; health workers; broader civil society; the involved vulnerable population(s); government departments and ministries; chiefs (in rural areas); social auxiliary workers; student social workers; volunteers; the private sector; international partners and donors. It is also evident from the case studies that the credibility of service organizations, such as the Youth Social Work Association in Uganda and the east African region, plays a critical role in the successes of activities promoting social and economic equality. In addition, partnerships with international and other role players are significant for effective social work service delivery and capacity building of marginalized populations, especially the youth. The success of activities is also related to the level of government involvement which ranges within the projects reflected in the case studies from no involvement to complete involvement in various departmental levels. Government role in setting aside resources in support of activities is highlighted as particularly important. 'Without equal resources, opportunity cannot really be equal' (Isbister, 2001: 9).

### *Social and economic issues and rights influenced*

Social workers and social development practitioners engage in activities that promote the right to health, education, shelter (housing), food, water and economic empowerment. This affirms the claim that social work is a human rights profession (Ife, 2012). The right to education includes adult literacy and early childhood development, including day care centres and placement of children in schools. The right to adequate food supply and nutrition is linked to activities such as food gardens; preparing nutritional dishes in an economic manner; food parcels as incentive to attend entrepreneurial skills training and negotiating with farmers in the surrounding areas to plough the field and to donate seedlings. The right to health includes HIV and Aids awareness campaigns; talks at schools on such topics as teenage pregnancies, and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The right to water includes the development of funding proposals to obtain donor funding to sink boreholes, install water pumps and taps, in particular at rural schools, and securing access to water for vegetable garden projects. The right to social security includes rural campaigns to assist beneficiaries to apply for relevant social grants and assisting them to get identification and other relevant documentation for this purpose. The right to social security also includes protecting children from physical, mental and sexual abuse through preventative measures and/or statutory intervention. The right to housing includes finding accommodation for children who are

temporarily or permanently removed from home. Victims of domestic violence are accommodated in shelters and HIV/Aids orphans in drop-in centres. Economic empowerment is linked to facilitating opportunities for training in entrepreneurship; access to finances; saving opportunities and linking groups and communities to markets for their goods and services.

The activities reflected in the case studies and the socio-economic rights that these activities address, indicate the affirmation of Sen's (2008) view of poverty as 'unfreedoms' of various kinds, including the absence of health facilities, lack of education and the subjugation of women, amongst others.

### *The level of influence*

The Youth Social Work Association organize debates and interactive talk shows in communities and through the media (radio, television, text messages) at local, national and regional levels. They have also initiated income generating activities and then encouraged these beneficiaries to save their income in Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Furthermore, they have also organized a former child soldiers-led campaign for their rights where they presented a petition to the Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda. The Youth Social Work Association also initiates social enterprises for youth employment and sustainability of interventions in this regard such as advocacy for youth labour rights. The case study of the ITÊRÊLÊNG Women's Project reflects an effort by social workers and social development practitioners to influence the right to education, including adult literacy and early childhood intervention and child protection rights. The main purpose of advocacy practice 'is the pursuit of social justice' (Hoefer, 2012: 2) and in turn, 'Social justice is the most important aim of the social work profession and thus of advocacy practice' (Hoefer, 2012: 215).

### *Impact on practitioners and educators*

Social work and social development practitioners and educators involved in the case studies indicated that being involved in activities that promote social and economic equalities confronts them directly with the reality of poverty; it facilitates a better understanding of the link between social and economic aspects in development; it deepens the awareness of the struggle and courage of people making a living in the informal economy and it raises the importance of having a global perspective on local problems. Furthermore, social work and social development practitioners are stimulated to become more creative in finding methods to address social and economic problems with limited resources. Focusing on promoting social and economic equality and hence on the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, is therefore a renewing of the commitment of social work and social development practitioners and educators to eradicate poverty (Midgley, 1996).

### **Success of activities, innovations and lessons learnt**

The case studies indicate some successes in promoting social and economic equalities in a concrete manner in the Africa region. Successes are seen as children going to school; seeing families sleeping under well roofed houses without further fearing heavy rains; improvement of people's health; empowerment which leads to positive live changes such as expanding income generating activities and increasing savings; beneficiaries of agribusiness projects starting up own farms and gardens using the knowledge acquired from demonstration gardens, and women ex-combatants being fully integrated in their communities and accepted as human beings despite being formerly abducted

persons. Najjemba Clare, as reflected in the case study on 'Uganda Promoting Social and Economic Equalities in Rakai District, Uganda', aptly captures the reward for social workers to engage in promoting social and economic equality:

Seeing a child receive an education who would otherwise be at home without my intervention is fulfilling for me, watching someone who was fighting for life feeling lively and well gives me a reason to smile, feeding a hungry family and being the reason they sleep under proper shelter makes me feel proud of what I do. . . The activities I undertake are developmental and focus on improving the people's social functioning and general well-being.

On the other hand, projects such as the ITÊRÊLÊNG Women's Project, are successful in income generating projects, but on a limited scale as only small groups can be involved at a time due to human resource constraints. On the positive side, the annual exit of these women with self-starting packs and the intake of a new group of women on the waiting list contribute to skills development and income security. Planning for success is therefore important in relation to available resources. There are therefore lessons to be learnt from the case studies with regard to being able to present the evidence of successes.

The women ex-combatant project provides an example of the importance of alignment of activities with identified needs based on a baseline survey. The baseline survey includes information on the status of the target groups' economic and emotional well-being before the intervention(s) to allow measurement of the outcomes of the project. Evidence of successes in measurable terms indicates how ex-combatants girls had returned to school as a result of psycho-social and other social work support as well as improved incomes. Compared with the baseline information, it was also revealed that there was a greater acceptance of female ex-combatants at family and community levels following the interventions. Further evidence of successful re-integration into the community is that one of the beneficiaries was elected as a councillor in the local government. In relation to emotional well-being, the end line survey established that beneficiaries developed a sense of optimism. Furthermore, a group work approach for specific target groups such as women ex-combatants and youth is demonstrably effective in contributing to community development in a collective manner. Successes in promoting social and economic equalities through research are evident in publications such as reflected in the case of the national day labour study and the national street waste pickers' study.

Case studies emphasize the importance of cultivating a culture of self-reliance within people's capabilities and overcoming a dependency syndrome. Capabilities are strengthened through education and empowerment which motivate beneficiaries to take responsibility for achieving sustainable livelihoods. Social enterprises emphasize a sustainable agenda which is equally tied to business continuity and sustainable social and economic development, dependent on innovations in generating own financial resources. Agri-business value chains and social enterprises directly affect economic empowerment and social security as viable alternatives to sustainable household's livelihood.

Other lessons learnt from the case studies, if social and economic problems have to be addressed anew, are that empowerment should focus on income generating activities as well as knowledge on rights such as health and access to education; a gender focus should be included in activities, and local communities and leaders, especially at project inception, should be involved in activities to increase local project ownership. Engaging more women in activities will enhance the livelihoods of children at household level.

On a micro-level, case studies indicate that social and economic equality cannot be achieved without a focus on individual intervention. This was in particular evident in the case of children living on the street and women ex-combatants, whose emotional well-being cannot be achieved in

one year as, for example, some women experience re-occurrence of the post-traumatic stress syndrome. In addition to addressing structural issues, counselling sessions during project activities for beneficiaries, such as in the case of women ex-combatants and children living on the street, are important in order to deal with emotional well-being which proved fundamental in achieving changes in their lives. Within the context of promoting social and economic equality, there is a strong link between the personal, the micro-, and macro-practice and hence the remedial and maintenance functions cannot be excluded from the social change function of social work and social development (Midgley, 2010).

## Support guidance from IASSW/IFSW/ICSW

Case studies indicated a role for IASSW/ICSW/IFSW in promoting social and economic equalities. Exchange programmes were suggested as a support mechanism that can widen horizons in opening social work and social development practitioners' minds, expanding their skills and knowledge. Appreciation was also expressed for capacity building opportunities for both beneficiaries of social enterprise projects as well as for social work and social development practitioners in charge of implementing these projects. This could include guidance on how best to 'fight the dependency syndrome' and to help people utilize opportunities to escape from the poverty trap. Finally, funding for research on promoting social and economic equality remains a priority.

## Conclusion

This report points to social work and social development practitioners in Africa being committed to 'support, influence and promote global initiatives aimed at achieving social and economic equality' and their willingness to support and work in 'collaboration with others for the development of strong local communities that promote the sustainable social well-being of all their members' (*The Global Agenda for Social Work and Development*, 2012: 2). The activities reflected in the case studies indicate that social workers and social development practitioners engage in promoting social and economic equality in alignment with the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, more deliberate action is required by social work and social development practitioners and educators to confront structural issues that keep vulnerable groups socially and economically excluded. Best practice models of social work and social development practitioners standing up against injustices and embracing social inclusiveness are thus important in order for them to be recognized as significant contributors to promoting social and economic equality.

The platform has been created for the next phase to strengthen relationships with the United Nations' system and other international agencies and to prepare for the post-2015 development agenda. This includes strengthening the capacity of communities to interact with their governments to extend social and economic development (*The Global Agenda for Social Work and Development*, 2012: 2). There is clearly a role for social workers and social development practitioners to be politically more active in finding ways to effect policy change so that adequate levels of social provision can be made to people who need it (Ife, 2012).

The Africa region has initiated collaboration to promote education and practice standards in social work and social development that enable social workers and social development practitioners to facilitate social development outcomes (*The Global Agenda for Social Work and Development*, 2012: 2). The analyses of the case studies indicate singular findings on activities promoting social and economic equalities by social workers and social development practitioners. The quantitative research on promoting social and economic equality will be analysed and compared with the research results of the case studies. Research findings will position Africa to do comparative studies

on the Global Agenda with other regions. In addition to analysing research data and obtaining and comparing research results to determine best practices, curricula that address the issues of social and economic inequalities within schools of social work in Africa, will be compared and be shared with other colleagues within Africa and beyond.

It can be concluded that Africa has engaged with the objectives of The Agenda and the first phase of the African Regional Observatory for the Global Agenda. Social work and social development practitioners can, from their specific positions, shed light on issues related to promoting social and economic equality as well as the other related themes of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. They can provide their own evidence and interpretations that can be used by communities, policy-makers, practitioners, educators and researchers for the betterment of all.

### Submissions

‘A Day in the Life of Street Children: A Case Study of a Social Worker Making a Difference in the Lives of Street Children’, Uganda. Submitted by Titus Gerald Tumusiime, Programme Monitoring Officer, Eriks Development Partners, East Africa Region. Eriks is an International Swedish NGO that supports partners in 25 countries in the world.

‘Agri-Business Value Chains and Social Enterprises for Economic Empowerment’, Uganda. Submitted by Allan Nkonge.

‘ITÊRÊLÊNG Women’s Project on Social Services to Families and Sustainable Livelihoods’, South African Women Federation (SAVF), South Africa. Submitted by Erna Eloff, SAVF Carletonville Office.

‘Medical Social Worker (Kenya) in the Nyeri Provincial General Hospital’, Kenya. Submitted by Josphat K. Kiarri.

‘Promoting Social and Economic Equalities in Rakai District, Uganda: Case Study on Mannya Parish Kifamba Sub County’. Submitted by Najjemba Clare, Mannya Social Worker.

‘Reflections on a National Day Labour Study and a National Street Waste Pickers’ Study’, South Africa. Submitted by Rinie Schenck.

Youth Social Work Association (YSA) ‘Case Study Project Summary: Sustainable Livelihoods for Women Ex-Combatants (SLIWE)’, Uganda. Submitted by Geoffrey Tumusiime.

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